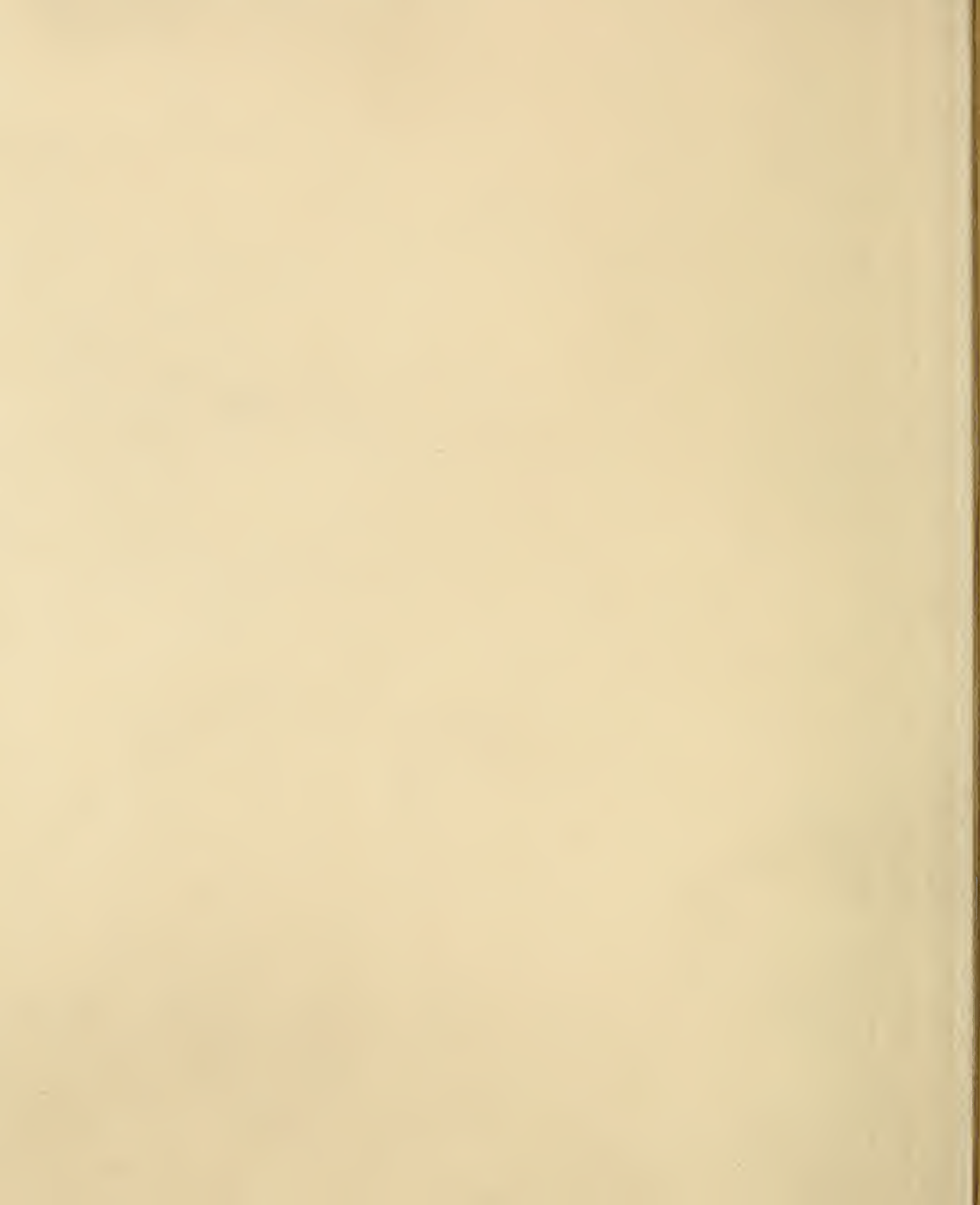


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# SALVAGE OF WOODEN CONTAINERS FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

A statement of the container situation and  
suggestions for a campaign to increase salvage

U.S. FOOD DISTRIBUTION ADMINISTRATION  
150 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Lumber supplies short

Container factories shift to war production

Labor shortage limits output

Threaten loss to food supplies

Shift to used containers needed to handle crops

Limitation order to aid salvage

Price ceilings cover new and old containers

Market re-use varies

Retail store is key to salvage

Second hand containers follow many paths

Many good containers wasted

Armed forces are source of salvage

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WHAT FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEES CAN DO

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SALVAGE OF WOODEN CONTAINERS  
FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

Lumber Supplies Short      A year ago, metal was the critical factor tending to bring about a container shortage. This year, it's wood. Production of lumber for containers is now running about 25 percent short of the demand. Shortages of labor and machinery have cut production, while increasing demands for military and lend-lease purposes are further reducing civilian supplies. With lumber inventories for 1943 hardly 50 percent of normal, major shifts from new to second hand containers must be made, as less new wood will be available for handling the 1943 crops.

Container Factories Shift      Aside from the shortage  
to War Production      of lumber, many factories have been diverted to war purposes. Factories which made boxes and crates for agricultural products now meet demands for crating guns, planes, ammunition, and other overseas supplies.

Labor Shortage      Makers of wooden containers are  
Limits Output      handicapped by a shortage of labor, and many workers, who formerly made containers for agricultural products, are now in the armed forces or in other war industries. Basket manufacturers emphasize the seriousness of the situation when reporting a sharp drop in output per machine due to less efficient help. Operators of the type formerly available turned out 150

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\*Prepared at 150 Broadway, New York City by Northeast Regional Office, Food Distribution Administration, in cooperation with Fruit and Vegetable Branch, FDA, and Economics Section of U. S. Extension Service.

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bushel baskets an hour as compared to outputs now, on the same machines, of 75 to 100 baskets an hour.

Threaten Loss of  
Food Supplies

The situation is one of shortage of new containers and of potentially large crops of perishable products. Substitutes for new containers must be found if crops are to pass from the farms to the markets without waste. Many more second hand containers than usual will be needed and they must be re-used again and again if food supplies are to meet the demands of the markets.

Shift to Used  
Containers Needed  
to Handle Crops

It ordinarily takes 500 million wooden containers to carry normal crops of fruits and vegetables to market. Most of these are new ones, but new containers will be relatively scarce this year. More second hand containers will be needed. Re-use of baskets, hampers, lugs, and citrus crates or boxes is fairly common but they can be re-used oftener if more care is given to proper handling, opening, storing, and resalvaging. Much greater attention, will need to be directed to salvaging climax baskets, bushel boxes, and crates, and crates for cantaloupes, lettuce, celery, cauliflower, berries, carrots, and the like. Salvage of all types runs from 20 to 25 percent a year. This will need to be increased greatly if the 1943 harvests are to proceed as usual.

Limitation Order  
to Aid Salvage

In order to make possible the more efficient use of such container-type lumber as is available, a limitation order has been issued by the War Production Board (L-232).



This tends to standardize and simplify the types manufactured with emphasis on the production of those which are most suitable for re-use. Eight of these are hampers, baskets, and berry cups. The other 64 are boxes and crates. But an important source of second hand containers in 1943 will continue to be the several hundred types now in common use.

Price Ceilings

Apply to New and  
Old Containers

Price ceilings apply to new agricultural wooden containers under Maximum Price Regulation 320 and amendments thereto. To

assure adequate production of new containers, increased costs of labor and raw materials are generally included. For the East Central and Southern States, for example, the 1942 price ceilings for new containers reflect a 22 percent advance in production costs. Prices for most used containers were set as of March 1942, but consideration is being given to establishing specific ceiling prices on used containers, based possibly on values proportionate to ceilings for new containers.

Market Re-Use

Varies

A recent study made in upstate New York markets illustrates the difference in salvage operations

in different markets. In "A" city, 91 percent of all cauliflower, 96 percent of all snap beans, and 99 percent of all tomatoes are packed in second hand containers. In "B" city, only 21 percent of the cauliflower, 7 percent of the snap beans, and 13 percent of the tomatoes are in used boxes. These cities are hardly 100 miles apart yet the packaging practices are very different. During the emergency, why not seek to bring re-use in the "B" cities to the level of salvage in the "A" cities?

In Chicago and New York, too, salvaging practices follow different lines. The California lettuce crate is held at a premium in Chicago while the bruce box is apt to be discarded. In New York, on the contrary, the bruce box is an important item while little attention is paid to salvaging the California lettuce crate, though both reach both markets.

Retail Store Is  
Key to Salvage

The retail store, where containers are emptied, is the key point in any salvage program for containers for agricultural products. Much damage may occur at that point and the route the container takes back to market channels may be determined there. Containers may be badly damaged in opening. They may be discarded, whether damaged or not. Or they may be returned to trade channels for re-use in the shipment of fruits and vegetables. Because of short supplies, fewer new containers will become second hand in 1943 and greater care must be taken if the older used ones are to be repeatedly resalvaged. In any case, enough should be returned to the growers to ship agricultural products through market channels.

Second Hand  
Containers Follow  
Many Paths

Used containers follow many paths in the salvage process. Retailers may sell them direct to farmers or to collectors, or return them to the markets. Some containers are picked up by garbage collectors who sort out the good containers and sell them to dealers. Peddlers collect many empty containers from retailers and restaurants and sell them to farmers at the farmers' market or to larger dealers. But they may also be lost to the fruit and vegetable trade through sale to fish dealers, egg dealers, bakers, and the like.



A large portion are discarded, wasted, or broken. Many are burned.

Most of the containers which are saved are salvaged by regular collectors. It may be possible to expand their operations. Chain stores also return containers regularly from their stores to collection centers, where they are repaired and sold to dealers or farmers. There is little room for increased collections there.

Many Good  
Containers  
Wasted

But these channels do not gather in all the containers which reach the retailer. Many retail stores handle but a few containers each week. Few such stores have regular contacts with dealers or "junkies" as the number of containers does not ordinarily justify the expense of a regular pick-up service. A survey of such stores in Albany, N. Y., disclosed that about 3,000 containers, at the rate of 6 to 8 per store, were being wasted each week. Instead of going back to the grower, they were being used for firewood, garbage collection, and the like. These containers could be salvaged.

Army Is Source  
of Salvage

Each service command of the Army, has an officer who is in charge of all salvage operations, including the salvage of metals, shell cases, cartons, paper, egg cases, fats, and wooden fruit and vegetable containers. In every camp, a post officer is charged with overseeing the proper opening and return of containers to the receiving center. There, they are held for the bidder who has contracted to purchase them. Such contracts are awarded under sealed bids which are submitted on the basis of supplies of containers on hand or which are expected to be on hand during a certain period. However, the highest bidder does not always get the contract. Preference is given to dealers who agree

to take all containers rather than to the specialists who bid on a selective basis, even though the latter may state the highest bid. At times, full loads may be sold separately to nearby dealers or farmers.

Navy Is Source  
of Salvage

In the Navy, the salvage of wooden containers for agricultural products is under the jurisdiction of the Salvage and Conservation Section of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, with a naval officer at each station responsible for this salvage activity. Arrangements may be made for collections at regular intervals, or sales may be made by invitation or negotiated contract. The Navy Department at Washington or the local officer in charge of salvage can give details on such arrangements. Some containers may not always be salvaged by the armed forces but this is usually due to the lack of dealers or handlers who have expressed a willingness or interest in buying such containers. The personnel at these places is being continually urged to do a better pick-up job. Salvage officers have indicated a willingness to consider any suggestions for improving their salvage operations.

New Uses for  
Old Boxes

Although most containers are manufactured for particular products, many substitutions are possible. Bruce boxes for example, are designed to package oranges but they may be used for packaging potatoes, sweet potatoes, root crops or leafy vegetables. Western lettuce crates can be used for bunched beets and carrots, cabbage, cauliflower, and inferior grades of melons. Citrus crates may be used for packaging eggs and a variety

of vegetables and fruits. Agricultural colleges are studying possibilities of various substitute uses of other containers.

### What the Food Advisory Committees Can Do

The Food Advisory Committees are in a position to help increase the salvage of wooden containers. The committees have contacts with every branch of the food trade and can encourage the salvage of all re-usable types of agricultural containers by the trade. Some of the suggested ways in which the committees can help follow. (The first four suggestions are particularly important.)

1. A list of dealers in used containers should be prepared and submitted to the regional office immediately. This list is needed for several purposes. First, dealers must be contacted in determining certain national policies; second, the Extension Service, the armed forces, and other government agencies have requested that lists be prepared; and third, lists of dealers will expedite the exchange of containers among container dealers, producers, retailers, restaurateurs, hotel managers, and institutional officials.
2. A subcommittee of the local Food Advisory Committee should be formed to plan the campaign. This committee should include wholesale distributors, retailers, hotel and restaurant representatives, and other interested persons. County agricultural agents and dealers in used containers should also be invited to work with the subcommittee.

3. Informational campaigns to save containers should be sponsored. Through newspapers, radio broadcasts, posters, and stickers, the subcommittee can encourage conservation of containers. The need for salvaging used containers should be particularly emphasized to retailers, restaurateurs, hotel operators, institutional officials, wholesalers and intercity truckers.
4. Provisions should be made for the convenient and economical transfer of used containers from retailers, wholesalers and other handlers to farmers in case adequate facilities are not now provided.
5. Through contacts with wholesale produce dealers, the committees can urge that there be no discrimination against produce which arrives in second hand containers. They can encourage growers to buy containers in advance and to store them on their farms.
6. The committees can sponsor drives by civic organizations to collect and salvage containers -- The Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, Future Farmers, and other youth organizations can collect containers from the smaller retail stores and bring them to a central point where they can be purchased and picked up by a dealer.
7. Reconditioning centers can be established where damaged containers may be repaired. Such centers can be established in conjunction with the operation described in (6).



8. The Food Advisory Committee should make every effort to encourage operations by "junkies." In many markets, "junkies" are discouraged from doing business. They are often treated as scavengers in the fruit and vegetable trade rather than as a useful part of it. "Junkies" can and do make a definite contribution to the trade.



